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ABSTRACT

A study examined the promises and limitations of the entertainment-education strategy used in development communication and charted some future directions for this approach. The approach began in the 1970s with the recognition that mass media has its limitations in fostering national development; a more participatory development theory emerged stressing the importance of community involvement, interactive two-way communication, and small media. However, lately, with the globalization of media, the rise in entertainment programming, and questions about media's ubiquitous influence, entertainment-education represents the one specific trend for development that shows promise. The strategy includes an educational, instructional-development message, transmitted by an entertaining communication channel, to foster pro-social change. A Peruvian "telenovela" ("Simplemente Maria") serves as a case study of how the process works, and how it differs from "boredom-education" programming. New directions for entertainment-education could include: (1) moving from a production-centered approach to an audience-centered approach in program design; (2) incorporating more cultural, humanistic traditions in both design and research of programs and more rigor in evaluating the educational effects of programs; (3) drawing more on area studies such as attitude change and persuasion, social marketing, and cognitive information processing in implementing programs; (4) moving from a primary focus on family planning and public health issues to creating programs to address other development needs; and (5) considering the likelihood that the strategy will spill over into classroom instruction and distance learning. (Contains one figure and 50 references.) (NKA)

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Entertainment-Education: Where has it been? Where is it going?

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Entertainment-Education: Where has it been?
Where is it going?

Abstract

In the past two decades, an innovative development communication strategy has emerged, which has shown some inital promise. This strategy, which combines entertainment and educational messages to promote pro-social change, is more commonly referred to as the entertainemnt-education strategy. Here we take stock of the promises and limitations of the entertainment-education strategy, charting some future directions for this development communication approach.

Entertainment-Education: Where has it been?
Where is it going?

During the past several decades, ideas on how the mass media can be effectively used to address national development needs have changed greatly. Until about the late-1960s, the mass media were hailed as powerful development tools that could educate large populations, disseminate knowledge, and foster national development in the newly-independent countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In the 1970s, the limitations of the mass media in fostering national development were recognized, and the old development paradigm based on the western model of linear knowledge dissemination was debunked (Rogers, 1976).

A more participatory development theory emerged stressing the importance of community involvement, interactive two-way communication, and small media (Wang & Dissanayake, 1982; Nair & White, 1987). Development communication scholars and practitioners expressed hope about media's newly-prescribed role in improving the quality of life of a nation's people, and success stories were documented and discussed. Now, almost 25 years after the emergence of a participatory-centered development theory, beliefs about the media's role are again being questioned. The rapid globalization of media, the rise in the consumption of

entertainment programming, and unanswered questions about media's ubiquitous influence have accentuated the potential evils and potential benefits of mass media.

There is one specific trend in the use of media for development that shows some promise (Singhal & Rogers, 1989a). That trend is the growing production of entertainment-education programs. The entertainment-education media strategy includes an educational, instructional-development message, which is transmitted by an entertaining communication channel, with the purpose of fostering pro-social change (Singhal & Rogers,, 1988; Brown, 1992a; 1992b). The concept of entertainment-education evolved as educators and development practitioners sought to disseminate information, knowledge, and prosocial messages through entertainment programs (Singhal & Rogers, 1989b). Theorists hypothesized that by producing entertainment programs with educational content designed to meet social and development needs, media users could be entertained and educated at the same time (Brown, 1992c). Another appeal of entertainment-education programs centered around the opportunity to balance commercial interests of entertainment producers with social interests of the audience members, while serving national development goals (Kincaid & Others, 1993).

The purpose of the present paper is to take stock of the entertainment-education strategy as a development communication tool. Using hindsight, coupled with the wisdom of lessons learned from the past decade or two of enter-

tainment-education efforts, we explore the merits and problems of this presently "in vogue" development communication strategy. We also project where the field of entertainment-education is heading, or should be heading, as interest in the use of the entertainment-education strategy continues to rise worldwide.

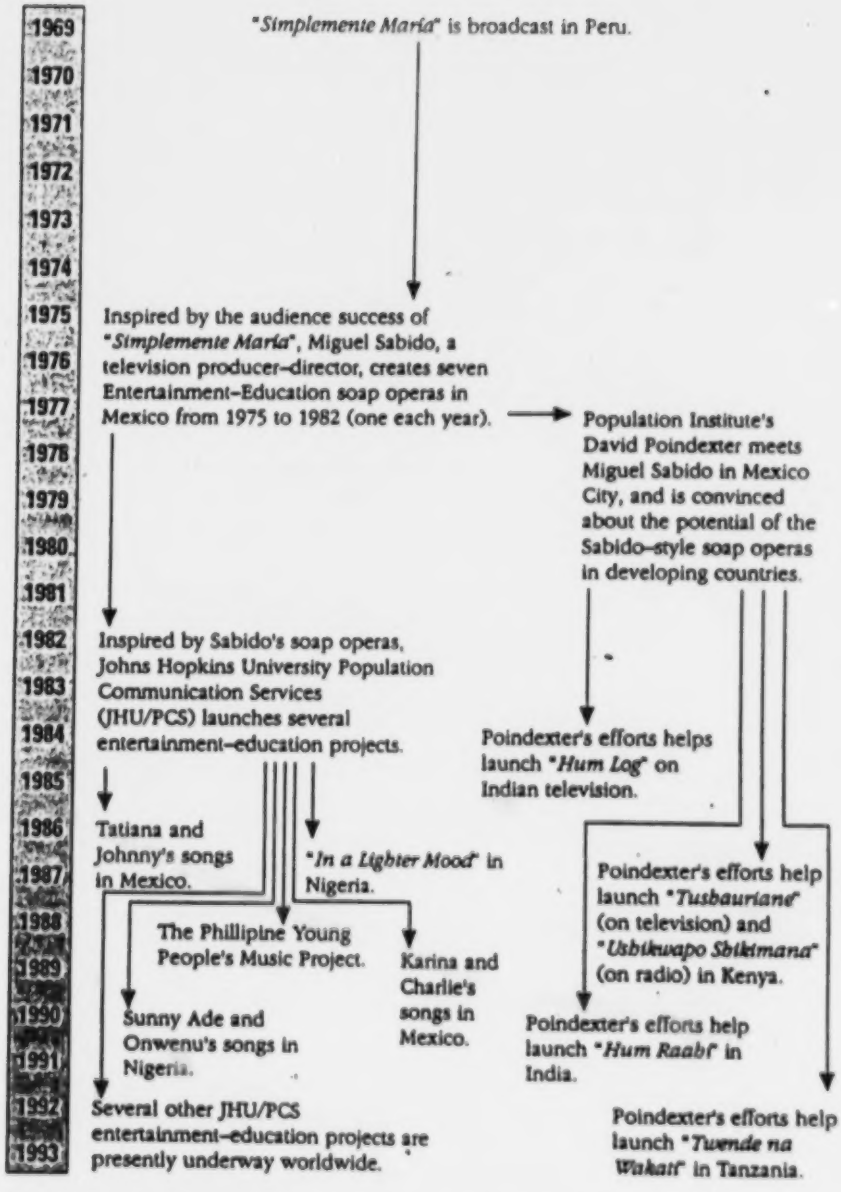
Entertainment-Education: Where has it Been?

The idea of combining entertainment and education to produce social change is not new: It goes as far back in human history as the timeless art of storytelling. In countries where a rich oral tradition still persists, folktales with moral messages are an integral part of people's non-formal education. Folk theater, dance drama, fables, morality plays, religious music, and other art forms have display many elements of the entertainment-education strategy (Valbuena, 1987; 1988) .

However, the idea of purposively combining entertainment with education in the modern mass media channels -- radio, television, film, video, rock music, and others -- is a relatively new concept (Singhal & Rogers, 1989c). The entertainment-education strategy in radio was institutionalized in 1951 with the broadcast of the popular British radio soap opera, "The Archers". This program continues to be broadcast in Britain in 1995, making it the longest running entertainment-education television program of all time. "The Archers" was purposely designed to promote

farming innovations in Britain, given its agricultural economy was ravaged after World War II (Food and Agriculture Organization, 1987). Since the late, 1950s, a highly skilled radio scriptwriter in Jamaica, Elaine Perkins, has produced several series of soap operas, each designed to promote an educational-development issue (Cambridge, 1992; Hazzard & Cambridge, 1988). In more recent years, Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services, Center for Communication Programs, headquartered in Baltimore and Population Communications-International, a non-profit organization headquartered in New York, have helped launch entertainment-education Radio soap operas in several African countries, with generally positive educational outcomes (Lattenmaier & Others, 1993; Rogers, Vaughan, and Shefner-Rogers, 1995).

The conscious use of the entertainment-education strategy in television and rock music are relatively more recent, and owe their inspiration to the work of a creative writer-producer-director of television in Mexico, Miguel Sabido (Figure 1). Sabido, who was inspired by the educational effects of a Peruvian soap opera, "Simplemente María" in Latin America, pioneered the entertainment-education strategy in television by proposing a theoretic framework for designing entertainment-education telenovelas ("television novels" or soap operas) (Nariman, 1993; Singhal, Rogers, and Brown, 1993; Singhal, Obregon, ~~and~~ & Rogers, 1994). His message design framework for entertainment-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"Simplemente María" is broadcast in Peru.
Inspired by the audience success of "Simplemente María", Miguel Sabido, a television producer–director, creates seven Entertainment–Education soap operas in Mexico from 1975 to 1982 (one each year).
Population Institute's David Poindexter meets Miguel Sabido in Mexico City, and is convinced about the potential of the Sabido–style soap operas in developing countries.
Inspired by Sabido's soap operas, Johns Hopkins University Population Communication Services (JHU/PCS) launches several entertainment–education projects.
Poindexter's efforts helps launch "Hum Log" on Indian television.
Tatiana and Johnny's songs in Mexico.
"In a Lighter Mood" in Nigeria.
The Phillipine Young People's Music Project.
Karina and Charlie's songs in Mexico.
Poindexter's efforts help launch "Tusbauriane" (on television) and "Ushikwapo Shikimana" (on radio) in Kenya.
Sunny Ade and Onwenu's songs in Nigeria.
Poindexter's efforts help launch "Hum Raabi" in India.
Several other JHU/PCS entertainment–education projects are presently underway worldwide.
Poindexter's efforts help launch "Twende na Wakati" in Tanzania.

Figure 1. Some recent entertainment–education projects worldwide and how each was influenced by its predecessors.

Source: Singhal (1990).

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education telenovelas included the incorporation of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977); dramatic theory (Bentley, 1967); and archetypical theory (Jung, 1970). Research indicated that Sabido's 11 telenovelas in Mexico achieved high audience ratings and met most of their educational-development objectives like promoting adult literacy, a higher status for women, family planning, better treatment for children, and others (Nariman, 1993). Learning from Mexico's entertainment-education telenovelas, both India and Kenya produced similar types of dramatic television serials (Singhal & Rogers, 1989a; Brown, 1990; Brown & Cody, 1991). In 1995, more than a dozen countries have been inspired to broadcast entertainment-education television programs, including soap operas, sitcoms, variety shows, mini-series, and others (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994).

The audience success of Sabido's telenovelas in Mexico inspired Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services to launch rock music campaigns in Latin America, the Philippines, and West Africa, and also to experiment with the strategy (in most cases with positive outcomes) with other media formats in radio, television, print, and theater (Kincaid & Others, 1988; 1992; 1993; Piotrow, 1990; 1994; Rimon, 1989). In recent years, Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services has become an institutional leader in implementing entertainment-education efforts worldwide (Coleman & Meyer, 1990). Their rock music campaign in Mexico involving two young

rock singers, Tatiana and Johnny, is well known. The two singers performed a song called "Cuando Estemos Juntos" ("When We Are Together"), whose words encouraged teenagers to be sexually responsible. Played an average of 14 times per day over a three month period by the average Mexican radio station, the song raises consciousness among Mexican young people about the issue, leading to more responsible sexual behaviors among teenagers (Kincaid, Jara, Coleman, & Segura, 1988).

At the present time, we anticipate some 50 entertainment-education communication projects in over 30 countries are presently underway. Interest in the entertainment-education communication strategy is clearly on the rise. The 1994 United Nations Population Conference in Cairo recognized it as a viable communication strategy for population communication, and in recent years, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has considered the adoption of this strategy to target adolescents at high risk for drug abuse and HIV/AIDS (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994). However, for policy-makers in many countries, the entertainment-education communication strategy is still an enigma. Many are still not convinced that it can work. Unfortunately most of the research conducted to date on the entertainment-education communication strategy, barring a few exceptions, has had methodological drawbacks which make claims of media-induced behavioral change somewhat suspect. This problem may be overcome as more rigorous

research designs are put in place to evaluate the audience effects of entertainment-education programs.

The Promise and Limitation of Entertainment-Education

The promise of the entertainment-education strategy is a direct result of at least two undesirable trends in contemporary mass media programming: (1) entertainment-degradation programs, and (2) boredom-education programs (Singhal, in preparation). The entertainment-education strategy, most will agree, represents a more socially-desirable alternative to both these undesirable programming trends.

Entertainment-degradation programs represent a growing trend in modern popular culture of "degrading" a message to increase its entertainment value in order to achieve a larger audience. Howard Stern's "shock radio", perceived by many viewers as lewd and repulsive, is an example of this undesirable trend. The increasing depiction of explicit sexual content and graphic violence in entertainment television and videos are also examples of this negative societal trend.

Boredom-education programs represent a type of educational programming which, despite good intentions and heavy investments, are perceived as dull and didactic by audiences. The prosocial educational content is overtly emphasized to the point that the audience members are

annoyed. Audience members also lose interest because of the slow-paced non-engaging presentation style of many educational programs.

Entertainment-education programs provide an opportunity to overcome the limitations of entertainment-degradation and boredom-education types of programs. They provide an opportunity to be socially responsible, commercially profitable; further they can make education engaging and rewarding for audience members. When one evaluates the past two decades or so of entertainment-education efforts, there is clearly evidence to support that entertainment-education programs provide an effective counter, as well as a more socially-desirable alternative, to entertainment-degradation and entertainment-boredom programs (wang & Singhal, 1992; Ball-Rokeach & Others, 1984; Church & Geller, 1989).

However, entertainment-education programs are not free from limitations. They generally need higher start-up costs, more investments in formative research, and more skilled production personnel to produce the entertainment-education mix. There is no fixed formula for how much entertainment and how much education to mix, so creativity in message design becomes a critical factor. Translating the theoretical constructs of message design into practical plots is problematic, unless the scriptwriting team is highly skilled (Mendelsohn, 1971). Once launched, assuring a quality production is ~~not always a guarantee.~~ difficult. The danger for the entire duration of broadcasts

of vested interests taking over are always present as producers, actors, commercial sponsors, and development officials vie for profits and recognition.

Then there are a host of ethical problems. The key ethical question is: Who is to determine what is right for whom (Brown & Singhal, 1990; Brown & Singhal, 1994)? What constitutes "pro-social" for the message production team might not be considered so by the audiences. Also, audience members process messages selectively, and might read multiple interpretations of the intended educational message (Ram, 1993; Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992). These problems are not entirely insurmountable, nor can they be completely overcome. These ethical problems are common to all forms of persuasive communication, thus all forms of development communication must wrestle with these dilemmas. These must be discussed and debated both by the message producers of entertainment-education as well as the intended receivers.

Entertainment-Education: Where is it going?

The entertainment-education strategy is likely to chart new territories in the future, despite its limitations. Overall, this strategy has shown promise. Here we outline the new directions where the field of entertainment-education might be headed, or should be headed:

1. Moving from a "production-centered" approach to a more "audience-centered" approach in designing entertainment-education programs. Entertainment-education programs

have often come under criticism for their seemingly one-way, non-participatory quality. They have also been criticized for allowing commercial (production-centered) interests to override social (audience-centered) interests. Creators and implementers of entertainment-education programs must attend to such issues more carefully.

Formative research can help bridge the gap between producer and audience goals. However, by itself formative research is not enough. Producers of entertainment-education programs should try to more actively involve the target audiences in the actual production of media messages.

Such a participatory form of entertainment-education message development occurred in the Kheda Communication Project (KCP) in Gujarat, India, where target audiences (villagers of Kheda District) regularly participated in designing and acting in entertainment-education television serials (Mody, 1991). Several KCP's television serials, including "Chatur Mota" ("Wise Elder") and "Nari Tu Narayani" ("Women You Are Powerful") can be considered as exemplars of participatory forms of entertainment-education programming. In the U.S., the Office of Latino Affairs in Washington D.C. also utilizes such a participatory form of message design approach in their entertainment-education television series, Linea Directa, which is broadcast on Spanish language channels in the U.S.

2. Incorporation of more cultural, humanistic, and

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literary traditions in both designing and researching entertainment-education programs. To date most entertainment-education programs have been designed and/or researched utilizing primarily social scientific theories (social learning theory, diffusion of innovations theory, para-social interaction theory, etc.) and methods (survey research methods, audience ratings, etc.). While useful, these social-scientific theories and methods have their limitations (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994).

In recent years, several additional insights about the nature of entertainment-education programs have been gleaned by designing and researching them from the theoretical viewpoints from the cultural, humanistic, and literary traditions (Lozano, 1992; Lozano & Singhal, 1993; Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992; Ram, 1993; Singhal, Obregon, & Rogers, 1994; Svenkerud, Rahoi, & Singhal, 1995; Storey, 1995). In the future, we are more likely to see a further integration of cross-disciplinary theoretical viewpoints in designing and researching entertainment-education programs.

3. Drawing more on the knowledge vested in such area studies as attitude change and persuasion, social marketing, and cognitive information processing in implementing entertainment-education projects. To date, entertainment-education efforts have drawn heavily on the model of producing pro-social soap operas, pioneered by Miguel Sabido in Mexico in the 1970s, emphasizing such theoretical constructs as social modeling, archetypes, melodrama, and oth-

ers (Nariman, 1993). These multi-disciplinary theoretical constructs, drawing upon such fields as social psychology, literary tradition, and drama, have proved to be useful tools for entertainment-education message designers. However, the vast literature of such well-researched disciplines as attitude change and persuasion, social marketing, and cognitive processing of information, has not been so systematically integrated in the design of entertainment-education efforts. Entertainment-education efforts in the future should more systematically draw upon this vast reservoir of accumulated knowledge, which is easily accessible.

4. Incorporation of more rigorous research designs to evaluate the educational effects of entertainment-education programs. A field experiment design with pre-post and experimental/control data is best able to isolate audience effects as a result of exposure to entertainment-education messages. Few field experiments have been conducted to date because of the practical and ethical difficulties in having a control group that is not exposed to the entertainment-education messages (Rogers & Shefner-Rogers, 1994).

A field experiment with a multi-method data-collection strategy is presently underway to evaluate the effects of "Twende na Wakati" ("Lets Go With the Times"), a radio soap opera in Tanzania promoting family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention messages (Rogers, Vaughan, & Shefner-Rogers, 1995). Another field experiment research design is in

place to evaluate the effects of "Zhongou Baixing" ("Ordinary People"), a Chinese television soap opera presently in production (in 1995), which will promote the status of women, family planning, and HIV/AIDS prevention (Singhal, Rogers, Vaughan, & others, 1995).

Research evidence generated from such rigorous research designs (as field experiments) are more likely to convince policy-makers about the extent to which the entertainment-education strategy is able to meet its educational goals.

5. Moving from a primary focus on family planning and public health issues to creating entertainment-education programs to address other development needs. Most of the past entertainment-education programming efforts have focused on family planning, its proximate determinants like status of women and maternal and child health, and public health topics like HIV/AIDS prevention, oral rehydration therapy, and others. This emphasis on family size and related public health issues is understandable given the two institutional leaders in implementing entertainment-education efforts worldwide --Johns Hopkins University's Population Communication Services and Population Communications-International of New York -- especially emphasize population and public health issues. In the future, the scope of the entertainment-education strategy is likely to enlarge to include other development topics such as environmental conservation, human rights, racial tolerance, and

others, as more organizations embrace the entertainment-education approach (Singhal & Rogers, 1994).

6. The entertainment-education strategy is likely to go beyond its uses in mass communication to infect other areas such as classroom instruction, distance learning, and others. In recent years, a growing trend in instructional settings is for teachers to supplement straight lectures with audio-visual aids, classroom activities, and participatory games to enhance student involvement and learning. Such entertainment-education approaches to formal instructional practices are likely to grow in the future, especially with the arrival of multi-media technology in classrooms.

7. Demand for entertainment-education programming is likely to increase as arbitrary distinctions between the traditional entertainment, education, and information technologies further blur. This technology-led trend is evidenced by the increased availability of educational instruction through interactive multi-media, the information super highway, and other such channels.

Conclusions

We are much wiser in the 1990s about the entertainment-education communication strategy than we were a few years ago. During the remainder of this decade countries will be spending billions of dollars to sponsor, design, and implement communication and development assistance pro-

grams throughout the world. By applying the important lessons learned from past entertainment-education communication strategies, policy planners can more effectively use their influence and resources for development. The entertainment-education strategy in mass communication is one method that should be given more consideration in advancing development and prosocial goals. The lessons of the past provide a better understanding of how the social, environmental, and health dilemmas facing most of the world can be addressed through the entertainment-education strategy.

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